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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000780

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL UNGA PM KV
SUBJECT: PANAMA: THE LATEST ON KOSOVO

REF: REFTEL 91908

Classified By: Classified by POLCOUNS Brian R. Naranjo for
reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

Panama will recognize Kosovo in January

¶11. (C) "Panama will recognize Kosovo. We will recognize Kosovo after our term on the Security Council ends and before the new U.S. President is sworn in," 1st VP and FM Vice Samuel Lewis told Ambassador on September 30. Lewis reiterated that he believed that Panama could be more helpful on Georgia if it did not recognize Kosovo now. Ambassador noted that Panama had made numerous commitments to recognize Kosovo in the past, to which Lewis underscored Panama's commitment to recognize Kosovo in the first half of January.

Europeans Need to Lead on ICJ Referral

¶12. (C) "It is too hard for small countries like Panama to go against ICJ referral," Lewis said. "The Europeans need to carry the water on this issue. The French seem more interested in oil deals with Russia and integrating Serbia into Europe. If the Europeans are prepared to let ICJ referral go forward, Panama does not want to get in the way. What's Panama to do if the Euros don't get out in front on ICJ referral?" Lewis asked rhetorically. Ambassador and POLCOUNS re-deployed Reftel talking points, to which Lewis underscored that the Europeans need lead on this issue.

Comment

¶13. (C) Lewis' rationalization that it could be more helpful on Georgia if it did not recognize Kosovo is nonsense; Ambassador batted down this argument in her conversation with Lewis. Lewis is aware, however, that Panama cannot continue to come up with excuses on Kosovo recognition and needs to act. The commitment to recognize after Panama leaves the UNSC on December 31 and before the U.S. inauguration is the firmest commitment by Lewis to date to act on this matter. As for ICJ referral, whereas previously Lewis had suggested that his concerns were primarily legal, he has now clarified that they are primarily political, if tactical: if the Europeans are prepared to let ICJ referral go forward, Panama should not get in the way.

STEPHENSON